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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

9 September 1957

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 45-57

SUBJECT: THE OUTLOOK FOR KENYA

1. British policy for Kenya is ostensibly the same as that for West Africa and all the colonial dependencies, i.e., increasing grants of political responsibility leading towards independence at a rate the native population can handle. The UK hopes thereby to avoid conflicts with rising African nationalism and to preserve its influence and economic interests in Africa's undeveloped areas. However, in Kenya the British are confronted with a difficult, if not impossible, situation arising from two interrelated problems -- poverty and racial tension. A failure to make substantial progress toward the solution of these problems might provoke renewed violence, albeit in some less savage form than Mau Mau. Should violence in fact recur the consequences would be serious; Kenya's independence would be postponed, and the British and Western position throughout Africa would be jeopardized.

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2. Kenya's economic problems. Pressure of the population against limited resources is Kenya's prime economic problem. Two-thirds of the country is desert and fit only for nomadic grazing, 23 percent is in native land units, and five percent is alienated to Europeans. The extensive holdings of the white settlers are concentrated in the White Highlands area -- Kenya's best agricultural region. In native areas the elimination of disease, the subsequent growth of tribal populations, and the deterioration of soil fertility due to primitive agricultural practices combine to increase pressures on the government and on the white settlers. Because of over-population in native reserves Africans have pressed their claims to European property in the White Highlands. Britain's failure to satisfy native grievances, particularly the demands for additional land, was the foremost causative factor in the Mau Mau uprising.

3. Unfortunately, Kenya offers only limited possibilities to reduce population pressures either through diversification or development of the economy. The country has few minerals, no fuel, only minor resources for hydroelectric development, and at best only modest prospects for agriculture. Because of the limited agricultural resources, the bulk of agricultural production is devoted to subsistence crops; the production of cash crops -- largely dominated by the European community -- fails to balance foreign trade accounts. Thus Kenya has a continuing trade deficit and the country is wholly dependent on the UK for capital.

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4. The government, nevertheless, has tried to improve the economic situation over the past several years by concentrating on agricultural development. Extensive programs are in hand which emphasize consolidation of land holdings, improvements in animal husbandry, and reclamation of marginal land. These efforts will almost certainly contribute to increased African agricultural production. However, it is doubtful that progress will be sufficient either to overcome the trade deficit or to lessen racial tensions. To do much more regarding the latter issue would involve a new and more fundamental government approach to the white settler issue.

5. Racial Tensions. The two prime elements in the racial conflict are the settlers' hold on the White Highlands and settler dominance of political life. The settlers are determined to maintain their position in the Highlands, and they generally fear and reject any large increase in African political representation. But white settler attitudes towards the racial situation are not wholly united. On the one hand, the moderates, led by Blundell, support multiracial development and gradual political reforms for natives as the most feasible solution to Kenya's difficulties. On the other hand, large numbers of settlers reject even minimal increases in African political

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representation, fearing that any concession to native demands risks the eventual compromise of issues on which all white settlers are intractably united. Heretofore, the influence of the moderate Blundell group has been predominant. However, as African pressures for political equality and opening of the White Highlands grow, the moderates are forced to become less moderate. Thus the trend seems to indicate a stiffening of white settler attitudes along less moderate lines -- a trend unlikely to improve prospects for the future.

6. African response to racial discrimination, overcrowding, and uprooted economic and social traditions is to press for uncultivated land held by the settlers. The envy of attractive white settler property and the existence of large tracts of fallow land in the Highlands act as a constant stimulus of native resentment. In addition, the restriction of natives to reserves conflicts with basic African traditions and practices. Thus the land problem and its racial implications is a fundamental threat to native stability. The failure of Mau Mau demonstrated the difficulty of ejecting the white settlers by force, so the natives are turning increasingly to political agitation to gain their ends. The effort to break the racial impasse has become a political one.

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7. British reform efforts. British policy, stimulated by the Mau Mau crisis, has attempted to reconcile competing community interests with a program of multiracial development. Through multiracialism the British hope to protect the property interests of the white settlers, to insure the commercial interests of the large Asian-Arab community, and to promote gradually increased political representation for the natives. Specifically the government's political reforms are designed to increase African participation in the affairs of government by broadening native representation in the Legislative Council and Council of Ministers and by providing for direct elections of half of the members of the Legislative Council on a communal basis.

8. In September 1956 both the Europeans and Asian-Arabs voted for their representatives (14 Europeans and six Asian Arabs); in March of the following year the Africans, voting for the first time (except for Kikuyus, who are disfranchised), elected eight of their number to the Legislative Council. Results of the elections indicate that the cleavage between the racial groups has been widened. Although the representatives elected by the white settlers were moderates, they do not support a multiracial policy. The Asian-Arab representatives have supported the Africans, apparently in the belief that their interests are best served by opposing the white settlers.

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9. The African elections have made Tom Mboya, a young labor leader of proven capabilities, the focal point of African political activities. Mboya has provided the natives with the effective leadership they have heretofore lacked. The African group under Mboya's direction has repudiated multiracialism, refused to participate in the government, and demanded that African representation in the Legislative Council be increased from eight to 23. Both the British government and the Labor Party in London have counselled Mboya to modify his demands. However, whether he will do so, or whether he is even in sufficient control of the African group to do so remains unclear.

10. Mboya's strength is drawn mainly from the Luo tribe, the second largest in Kenya. This tribe's present dominance in native political affairs results from the proscription of the largest tribe, the Kikuyus, for its involvement with Mau Mau. However, with the rehabilitation and return of the Kikuyus to full political rights, a conflict might develop between the two tribes for political hegemony. At worst such a conflict might develop into an unprincipled struggle for leadership of the African movement. At best, both tribes might combine their strength in hot pursuit of common goals, i.e., complete independence. There appears to be little likelihood that the British

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will be able to weaken the African movement by encouraging a split between the two tribes. Hence the situation does not appear to be particularly propitious for further British reform efforts based on multiracialism and gradual political advancement for the native population.

11. British policies. The British are now faced with the failure of their programs and with the need for a more drastic approach to Kenya's difficult problems. But British efforts to introduce drastic measures are limited to alternatives which are both costly and dangerous. On the one hand, the British could expropriate white settler land for the native's benefit. This would mean compensation and risks an outbreak of settler reaction and a possible further deterioration of the economic situation. On the other hand, the British could deny any further political advances to natives and attempt to maintain the status quo by force. But this latter alternative risks almost certain outbreaks of native violence.

12. In this dilemma the British seem to be trying to walk a neutral tightrope. They are finding this difficult, and some of their recent moves seem to indicate an unwillingness to make any basic changes.

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13. Thus it is likely that the British will soon be faced with increased political agitation of dangerous proportions. If the British fail to face up to the problems, including the probable need for substantial expenditures, an increasingly tense situation will almost certainly develop. Past experience shows that such a situation can easily erupt into violence in Kenya. Sporadic acts of violence can be expected. However, should the situation get out of hand and serious disorders occur, political progress in Kenya would be significantly set back, independence delayed, and the economic situation further weakened.

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14. Effects on other African areas. British failure to resolve satisfactorily Kenya's problems virtually precludes any prospects of an East African Federation and will almost certainly alarm neighboring Uganda and Tanganyika. Prospects for an East African Federation remain largely dependent on Britain's success in promoting parallel time tables for self-government throughout East Africa. Britain's failure to resolve the racial and economic problems of Kenya thus risks encouraging additional Uganda opposition to Federation with Kenya. Moreover, African demands in Kenya will almost certainly receive sympathetic support in Uganda, if only as a tactic to pressure the UK into granting additional self-government in Uganda. In the case of Tanganyika any increase of unrest would probably result in pressure on the UK from the Trusteeship Council.

15. Further afield the repercussions might be even more serious. Both the white settlers and the Africans in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland to a large degree regard Kenya as an indication of British policy towards colonial areas with a white settler problem. On the one hand, British action adverse to Kenya Africans could promote further African disaffection with the Central African Federation scheme in predominantly native Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. On the other hand, British action adverse to settlers in Kenya might encourage


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Southern Rhodesia to leave the Federation and model its policies on those of the Union of South Africa. Thus the UK's policies towards Kenya over the next few years could have a profound effect on the British position and on the future of the Commonwealth in Africa.

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